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AZALEA PETAL BLIGHT

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Azalea petal blight, caused by Ovulinia azaleae Weiss, continues to be a destructive disease of azalea flowers in Florida. This disease is widely distributed along the humid Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coasts. The damage to azaleas involves the flower, detracting from the aesthetic value of the plant.

SYMPTOMATOLOGY

First symptoms appear as minute, circular, water-soaked spots on the underside of the petals. Environmental conditions, such as high humidity resulting from dew, fog, or rain, are favorable for disease development. These spots enlarge, appearing white on colored flowers (Fig. 1) and brown on white flowers. The flower becomes limp, and white masses of spores form on the petals.

Fig. 1. Spotting of azalea petals.

LIFE CYCLE

Primary infection comes from ascospores contained in apothecia borne on sclerotia (Fig. 2) found in debris around the plant in January or February. Spores are shot into the air, infecting lower flowers of

plants. When favorable climatic conditions occur, secondary conidia develop on primary infection sites. These conidia are then disseminated to other flowers.

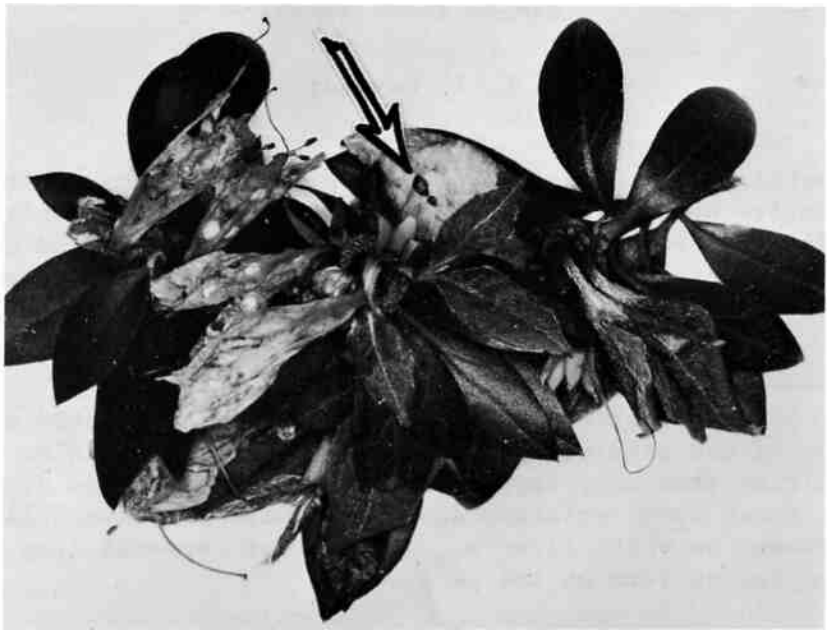

Fig. 2. Sclerotia formation on azalea petals.

CONTROL: The disease is difficult to control, but fungicide applications will help if started early enough and applied thoroughly often enough (every two days in most cases). Among the approved fungicides are itianeb, benomyl, thiram, Fore, and zineb. Terraclor can be used as a ground spray to prevent spore production from blossoms of the previous (and current) year fallen to the ground. Changing the mulch each year, or adding at least two inches of mulch several weeks before flowering will often help in control.

REFERENCES

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